

Design Workshops ¹

Overview

Design Workshops are organized using principles of Participative Design.¹ These principles assume that the people best able to improve their organization's relationships with the external environment, their core and support work, and their internal social infrastructure are the people who actually do the work. Principles of participative design prohibit leaders from devising plans for others to implement. These principles also require an organization to transform its organization design from a bureaucratic design to a participative (or democratic design).

Background

In the SST Protocol, when the Leadership Team and Assistant Superintendent for Transformation organize their district into clusters (academic, central administration, and non-academic support units), those clusters formed Cluster Design Teams. The Cluster Design Teams then collaborated with individual units within their clusters (individual schools in the academic clusters, individual departments within the central office, and individual departments or units within the non-academic support cluster) to create design teams for each of those individual units (e.g., a School Design Team is created for each individual school within an academic cluster).

The Cluster Design Teams then organized a Cluster Design Conference for all the smaller design teams within their clusters. The Cluster Design Conferences help participants understand and accept their district's new mission, vision, and strategic framework for guiding the transformation of the district. Participants also discuss ways in which their clusters need to transform to support the district's transformation goals.

At this point there are three strategies that the Cluster Design Teams can use to engage the smaller design teams in the transformation process.

Strategy 1: Keep all the design teams together. In a single 3-day Design Workshop the Cluster Design Team in collaboration with the Assistant Superintendent of Transformation facilitates the smaller design teams' efforts to devise specific action plans to transform their unit's environmental relationships, core and supporting work processes,

¹ Based on principles of Fred and Merrelyn Emery's *Participative Design* principles; e.g., see <http://www.vaughanconsulting.com/pdw.html>; <http://thechangehandbook.com/content/view/56/38/>;

and internal social infrastructure. Each design team would create action plans specifically tailored to their unit's needs, interests, and abilities. At the end of the Design Workshop all of the individual action plans would be collected and organized by the Cluster Design Team into a single comprehensive transformation proposal for the cluster.

Strategy 2: Each design team returns to its unit. With this strategy, at the completion of the Cluster Design Conference each smaller design team would return to its unit to conduct a single 3-day Design Workshop that involves all faculty and staff within each unit (e.g., a School Design Team would conduct a single Design Workshop for all the educators in its building). This strategy would require multiple 3-day Design Workshops—one for each academic unit, one for the central administration office, and one for each non-academic support unit). As with Strategy 1, the Cluster Design Team would collect all the individual action plans and organize them into a single comprehensive transformation proposal for its cluster.

The transformation proposals from each cluster would then be submitted to the Leadership Team and the Assistant Superintendent for Transformation. They would then organize all of those proposals into a master transformation proposal for the district. The master proposal would be submitted to the School Board for review and approval. After approval, the transformation proposal would be returned to the Leadership Team and Assistant Superintendent for Transformation who would then disaggregate the master proposal into its component proposals and return those to each cluster for implementation. Resources required for implementation would accompany the proposals as they are returned to the clusters.

Strategy 3: Conduct a series of Design Workshops. This strategy might be needed to complement either of the above strategies. Sometimes one three-day Design Workshop does not complete all of the design work that needs to happen. This is especially true for large, organization-wide transformation efforts. So, the Cluster Design Team may need to schedule a series of Design Workshops.

No matter which strategy is selected, the design teams for the school buildings, central administration office, and supporting work units are expected to involve members of the community as needed. We recommend that community involvement happens through a mechanism that is called a “learning community.” During the Design Workshop process the design teams are advised to solicit ideas from their learning communities, to share their design ideas with those communities, and to develop change proposals that demonstrate that the learning communities' input has been carefully considered.

The Design Workshop Process

Part I: Pre-Workshop Preparation

The Design Workshops are designed according to principles of Participative Design. These tested and proven principles literally revolutionize the way most organizations operate. They help to shift organizations from a bureaucratic organization design to participative, democratic design. Design Workshops structured in accordance with these principles can produce the same kind of “bureaucracy-to-participation” shift in a school system.

Before this kind of shift in organization culture and organization design can occur, it is essential that everyone be prepared for this major transition from “business as usual” toward orchestrated self-managing work teams that are situated within individual school buildings, central office departments, and non-academic support work units. Here’s how you prepare for this transition.

Your school board, administrators, faculty and staff, and the union(s) (if present) must agree that they want to transform your school system from a bureaucratic design to a participative design that uses orchestrated self-managing work teams. This agreement must be reached during *Phase 1—Prepare* of the SST Protocol. Your current leaders must then guarantee that the following conditions are met:

- There must be a new and well-defined mission, vision, and strategic framework for transforming the entire school system. This information is created in the district-wide System Design Conference near the end of Phase 1—Prepare (or at the beginning of Phase 2—Envision).
- District- and building-level administrators must be prepared and willing to redesign their job responsibilities (without violating any state laws governing education) so that they are freed to work in new, creative, and exciting ways to help their school systems provide quality education to children. These leaders do not turn over their management responsibilities to faculty and staff—they redesign them so they can lead more effectively, and so that their work becomes more satisfying and motivating for them.
- To reduce suspicion or resistance to the idea of system transformation, senior- and mid-level administrators must reassure faculty and staff that there will be:
 - no forced faculty or staff reductions as a direct result of the transformation
 - no going backwards in terms of pay.

- There must be a briefing for all faculty and staff that covers the following topics:
 - the underlying principles of participative design
 - the reasons for changing to orchestrated self-managed teams
 - a clear and resounding statement of commitment from the administrators and the school board
- There must be agreement as to how the results of the Design Workshops will be communicated to those parts of the school system that have not yet participated in the transformation process (because they will be participating later and these results can be used to facilitate organizational learning about how to increase the effectiveness of the district's transformation journey.)

Part II: The Design Workshop Process and Content

Since the characteristics of the work processes, social “infrastructure,” and environmental relations of the academic clusters, central office cluster, and support work cluster and their individual schools and support work units will probably vary, each Design Workshop must be designed around the unique needs of each cluster. This allows people to exercise the principle of “equifinality” which “...suggests that similar results may be achieved with different initial conditions and in many different ways” (Cummings & Worley, 1997, p. 87).

In all Design Workshops, people who have interconnected work responsibilities are invited to participate. Some design teams may decide to include community members and parents. Together, participants create innovative ideas to transform their environmental relationships, work processes, and internal social “infrastructure.” All of their creative thinking results in design ideas that must be aligned with the grand vision and strategic framework of the school system.

Key Features of the First Design Workshop

The first Design Workshop used as part of the SST Protocol is based on principles of participative design has three design features: assessment, redesign, and practicalities. Each of these is used to create a three-part activity structure for a Design Workshop. If a series of Design Workshops is required by a district, those subsequent Design Workshops will focus on continuing the transformation of the school system.

The activities for the first Design Workshop are highlighted below.

Activity 1: Assessment. People assess how their work is done now and their satisfaction with the current quality of work life. Following an introduction and a brief overview of the Design Workshop process, the following activities are completed:

- Briefing #1: “Design Principle #1--The Bureaucratic Organization”
- Small groups fill in the matrices for the *Six Psychological Criteria of Effective Work* (Emery, 1964). During this essential initial portion of the Design Workshop, all participants assess how well their current work environment satisfies six essential psychological criteria. The first three criteria measure how well individual needs are met by the **content of their jobs**. These are:
 - elbow room for decision-making
 - opportunities to learn on the job by setting their own goals and getting feedback
 - optimal variety of work experiences

The second set of three criteria measure the **social climate** of the workplace. These are:

- mutual support and respect
- meaningfulness of the job
- desirable career path

By tabulating, comparing, and discussing their scores on these six criteria, valuable but previously hidden data about the nature of their workplace and their social “infrastructure” is revealed. These scores also form a “base line” for evaluating the transformation journey in a series of *On-Track Seminars* that are conducted throughout the district’s transformation.

- Next, participants identify and analyze how they need to transform their work processes (teaching and learning in the academic clusters, academic support work in the central administration cluster, and non-academic support work in that cluster). As they discuss what they need to do to transform their work processes, they also make plans to assure that their new work processes conform to the *Six Psychological Criteria for Effective Work* identified above. By necessity, this analysis includes an examination of their unit’s internal social “infrastructure.”
- Next, participants identify the skills they currently have. This list is converted into a “matrix of skills currently held.”
- Then, participants identify the critical skills they will need to perform their work within the new paradigm. This list is converted into a “matrix of skills needed for the new paradigm.”

- Next, participants compare the “current skills” with the “needed skills.” This analysis helps them create a “gap analysis” which is then used to plan training and staff development opportunities.
- If all of the design teams are completing these activities in a single Design Workshop (Strategy 1 for organizing the Design Workshops), then each Design Team reports its discussions and findings to all the other design teams when the teams are reconvened for the purpose of debriefing their work.

Activity 2: Design. The various design teams create action plans to transform their environmental relationships, work processes, and internal social infrastructure in ways that help them satisfy the “Six Psychological Criteria for Effective Work.” Here is a list of the activities completed during this activity.

- Briefing #2: “Design Principle #2--The Democratic, Self-Managing Organization”
- Describe desirable characteristics for the organization design of the district, cluster, individual schools, central office departments, and non-academic support work units.
- Describe in detail the main characteristics of the Information-Age paradigm for teaching and learning process; the characteristics of a central administration office transformed into a central service center; and the characteristics of non-academic support work units transformed to support teaching and learning. Record all of this information on flip chart paper.
- Identify the features of the desired social “infrastructure”
- Invent more effective ways to relate to the external environment (for example, for each cluster and its individual schools, the environment includes the broader school system and the neighborhood(s) served by the cluster).
- Discuss what they need to do to transform the clusters’ environmental relationships, work processes, and internal social infrastructure.
- Interim Report—if the Design Teams are all together in a single Design Workshop (Strategy 1 for organizing Design Workshops) each design team reports their work to all the other teams for their response.

Activity 3: Practicalities. Design Teams compile all of their ideas for change into a single action plan.

- Briefing #3: “Implementation Strategies”
- The various design teams envision transformation goals, requirements for training and professional development, arrangements for internal coordination and improving external relations. They also explain how their design ideas will improve scores on their matrix for the *Six Psychological Criteria of Effective Work*.

- The design teams finalize their action plans and submit them to their Cluster Design Team. The Cluster Design Team then organizes all of the action plans into a comprehensive cluster transformation proposal.
- Final reports. Each Cluster Design Team shares the comprehensive transformation proposal with all faculty and staff within the cluster and invites feedback and discussion. The proposals are revised based on the feedback received. Final drafts of the proposals are submitted to the Leadership Team and Assistant Superintendent for Transformation for their review and approval. They organize all of the transformation proposals from the clusters into a master transformation proposal for the district. The Leadership Team and Assistant Superintendent for Transformation review the master proposal to assure it is aligned with the district's new mission, vision, and strategic framework for transforming the district. The master proposal is submitted to the School Board for review and approval. The Leadership Team and Assistant Superintendent for Transformation then secure human, financial, and technical resources needed to implement the proposal within the cluster.

Part III: Follow-up and Continuous Improvement

After implementation of change proposals begins, the daily operations of your school system are fine-tuned to work smoothly in support of the redesigned academic clusters, central service center, and support work cluster. As the new designs and practices are implemented, everyone gets the opportunity to apply the principles of participative design on the job; for example, meetings become more inclusive, work evaluations become more collaborative, and leadership functions are distributed throughout the school system.

Although the Design Workshops are intended for *Step 1: Design the School System activities*, the basic design of these workshops can be adapted for use by the various Organization Learning Networks that will emerge during *Steps 2-4: Create Strategic Alignment*. The Organization Learning Networks can use the principles of participative design to invent creative approaches to their daily work with each other and with students.

ⁱ A brief look back at the evolution of self-managing work groups... (retrieved on September 28, 2007 at <http://www.nmsu.edu/~iirm/articles/evol.html>).

Fred Emery and Eric Trist were the leading researchers in the landmark socio-technical field studies of self-managing teams. As organizational redesign methods which came out of them were field tested, unanticipated limitations appeared.

1939—controlled studies found that greater vitality, creativity, cooperation, commitment to, and time spent on the work task was characteristic of democratic (in comparison to bureaucratic and autocratic) structures.

1951—the first natural field experiment to find this structure in operation was in the British coal industry, where an alternative form of work structure based around self-managing workgroups was producing 25

percent higher output and 40 percent lower costs than another mine, similar in every respect (conditions, equipment and personnel) except the form of work structure.

1962 – 1969—the Norwegian Industrial Democracy Program proved the practical feasibility of self directed group structures. Consultancy organizations sprang up to provide this expert driven open systems approach which sought to jointly optimize the social and technical systems design of organizations, called Socio-Technical Systems Design.

1974 – 1993—to address the pitfalls of STS, Fred and Merrelyn Emery re-designed their process for re-designing organizations, calling it participative design. They set themselves to developing an approach that would circumvent the limitations. Working with the Australian Airforce, SAMCOR and Imperial Chemical Industries, they succeeded in seeing what was necessary. In rethinking the whole process of organizational redesign, they saw that leaving a bureaucratic structure in place made achieving optimization of both the social and technical systems difficult. So democratic processes were developed to create democratic structures.

In 1993 they brought this process to the U.S. Although participative design was developed some time ago, organizations have only recently been ready to make this shift (spurred on by the accelerating rates of change and turbulence in their markets).